

To Build a Home by inkyreveries

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Hurt/Comfort, M/M

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Neil Hargrove, Steve Harrington, pretty much everyone makes an appearance

Relationships: Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-12-08

Updated: 2017-12-08

Packaged: 2022-04-03 05:15:18

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 4,407

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

In which Neil Hargrove dies and Billy and Steve go back to Hawkins.

To Build a Home

The phone rings late on a Wednesday night.

“Is Billy there?”

“Hi to you too, Max. Yeah, he’s asleep on the couch.”

“Can you go get him?”

“Is everything okay?”

“It’s about Neil.”

Steve watches Billy’s face as he cradles the phone to his ear, his expression unreadable as he listens to Max on the other end. After a few minutes, he says a terse goodbye and then hangs up, turning to rest his palms on the kitchen counter.

Even though he’s facing away from him, after four years of Billy facing away from him when he’s upset, Steve thinks he’s gotten pretty good at reading his back. Billy’s shoulders are hunched, the muscles of his back bunching beneath the fabric of his t-shirt. Something’s wrong.

Just as Steve is opening his mouth to ask, Billy abruptly spins back around, wearing the same unreadable expression.

“My dad is dead.” He says flatly. “Skidded on some black ice driving home and flipped the car over. He was dead when they found him.”

Steve doesn’t know what to say. “Oh. Are you okay?” he asks tentatively, stupidly. *Of course not, dumbass.*

For a moment, Billy’s eyes meet his and his face crumples. Steve takes a step towards him, but then Billy’s face shifts again just as quickly.

Suddenly, Billy throws his head back and *laughs*. It sounds wrong,

Steve thinks. It sounds harsh and grating and forced. Steve hasn't heard Billy laugh that way since high school.

"Good riddance." Billy steps past Steve and out of the kitchen. "I'm going to bed." His tone is too light, too airy and Steve watches his shoulders slump as he goes into the bedroom, slamming the door behind him.

Steve stands in the kitchen for a long time before he follows.

The bedroom is dark when he enters, and it takes a moment for his eyes to adjust before he can make out Billy's shape. He's in bed facing the window, curled in on himself, back tense. Steve knows he's not asleep.

"Baby." Steve crawls into bed and curves his body around Billy's, pressing his lips to the back of his neck.

Billy doesn't say anything.

"Billy." Steve tries again. "I know you're awake."

"Max wants us to go back for the funeral" Billy finally rumbles, his voice muffled by the pillow. Steve slips his arm around Billy's waist then, pulling him closer. "It's on Saturday."

"Okay." Steve says once, processing. Then again, "okay. What do you want to do?"

Billy is quiet for so long that Steve almost falls asleep, his body jerking when he speaks again.

"We'll go. But not for him." Billy says almost inaudibly. "For Max."

Billy's voice sounds so defeated and it cuts through Steve like a knife. A memory flashes in his head of four years ago, when they'd stuffed their bags into the back of Billy's Camaro and left Hawkins for good.

Billy whoops as they speed past the sign announcing they are now leaving Hawkins. Metallica is blaring too loudly from the speakers, but Steve is too busy staring at Billy to care. It was like someone had taken an iron and smoothed out all the creases on Billy's face. Steve can't remember

ever seeing Billy's face so smooth, so worry-free. His left hand is hanging out the window, scooping up the wind, and a cigarette dangles from the corner of his mouth. God, my boy is beautiful, Steve thinks. As if he'd read his mind, Billy turns to him then and just smiles and fuck, Steve's never seen him look like that. Like he's finally free.

Steve knows what being back in Hawkins will do to Billy and it makes his heart clench to think about. For *four years* they had been working so hard to build this life they had together, to scrub away too many years of Neil Hargrove staining Billy's soul like wine. Watching Hawkins drag him back now is almost too much to bear.

Billy is still impossibly tense beneath Steve's arm and he suddenly feels like a total jackass. Because as hard as it will be for Steve to watch Billy go back there, it will be infinitely worse for Billy. And as much as Billy wants to act like he doesn't give a shit, Steve has this horrible sinking feeling that he's about to watch him implode.

They arrive in Hawkins at 7 on Friday evening, Billy already in a sour mood from their afternoon of flight delays, turbulence, and a jerky bus ride from Chicago. The taxi ride to the Harrington's is uncomfortably silent; Steve doesn't need to look at Billy to know how badly he's itching for a cigarette.

Steve had called his parents the day before to let them know he would be coming home for the weekend, unsurprised when his mother apologized profusely about already having booked a trip to Florence. He's secretly relieved; the last time he and Billy spent time with his parents had won the award for Most Awkward Dinner of his life: all coldness from his dad and overcompensation from his mom. This weekend shouldn't be about them. This weekend is about Billy.

Walking into his old house feels *wrong*, somehow, like stepping back in time. Nothing is different and yet everything is different. Billy must be feeling similarly uneasy because he drops his bag in the foyer and mutters something about needing a cigarette, sliding open the glass door and dropping into one of the deck chairs.

Billy doesn't close the door behind him; that's Steve's cue to follow.

So he does.

Billy's looking moodily at the pool when Steve sits down next to him, smoke curling from his lips.

"I hate being back here, Stevie." His voice cracks, and Steve watches him clench his jaw, watches him squeeze his eyes shut. "I just—God, fuck—I just hate it."

Billy takes a long drag from his cigarette, eyes still fixed on the water. Steve wishes Billy would look at him.

Instead, he reaches over and squeezes Billy's knee.

"I know, baby. I know."

They'd promised the kids they'd have dinner with them at the Wheeler's that night, and after much grumbling by Billy, Steve finally gets him out the door and into his old BMW, which his parents had kept "*in case you want to visit, darling.*"

Driving through Hawkins in his BMW with Billy in the passenger seat chain-smoking out the window gives Steve such bad *déjà vu* that he almost runs a red light. Memories cloud his vision of the times in high school when Billy would let him drive, after Neil had forbidden him from leaving the house and he'd had to sneak out and leave his precious Camaro behind.

It was a routine Steve had gotten used to by now. A pebble would clatter against his window, he'd hastily pull on a sweater, tiptoe down the stairs, and open the door to find Billy, sometimes bruised, sometimes bleeding, but always with a cigarette perched on his lip and a smile on his face that didn't quite meet his eyes.

"Want to go for a drive?"

Steve always does.

He drives around aimlessly, chasing away his own nightmares of tunnels and demodogs and air so dark you can taste it, ignoring the way his heart

clenches every time Billy sniffles.

A few miles in, Billy turns to him with blue eyes rimmed red and looks so goddamn hopeless that Steve has to pull over and grip Billy's hands as he chokes out promises that he'll take him away from here, away from Neil, away from everything that has ever hurt him and they won't have to hide anymore, Billy will never have to hide again—

He doesn't realize he had started crying until he tastes the salt running down his lips.

Billy doesn't say anything, he just lets his forehead rest against Steve's as their breathing evens out.

Steve pulls up to the Wheeler's and is immediately swarmed, Dustin barely giving him a chance to get out of the car before throwing an arm around his shoulders. (It still freaks him out that Dustin is now tall enough to do that).

“Steve-O!” he crows, shooting him the grin that Steve is so painfully fond of. He can't help but chuckle in response.

“I missed you too, shitstain.”

His exchanges with the rest of the kids are similarly affectionate, and it's only after he's ruffled El's hair that he realizes Max has been clinging to Billy *this entire time*.

“C'mon nerds, let's go inside and help Mrs. Wheeler set the table” he says to the group, shooting Billy a pointed look as he leaves him standing in the driveway with Max shuddering into his shoulder.

Steve is only half listening to Mrs. Wheeler's apologies that Nancy and Jonathan couldn't fly back from New York to see him—“they only just got back from Christmas break”—when Billy and Max come in a few minutes later.

The nerd brigade rushes Billy with an enthusiasm that makes Steve feel warm all over and, just for a second, he wonders why he left this life behind.

“Hi Steve.” Max gives him a tight squeeze, her eyes still puffy from

crying. “I really missed you guys.”

“We missed you too, Max.” And Steve hopes she understands that he’s trying to tell her what Billy still can’t.

She shoots him a look that lets him know she does.

After positively *fawning* over Billy—much to Steve’s amusement—Mrs. Wheeler announces that the food is ready.

Dinner is a rowdy affair, everyone talking over *everyone* as they try to update Steve and Billy on the latest news in Hawkins.

“She totally wants me to ask her to prom—”

“No, she doesn’t, Dustin, she just wants you to keep doing her Chem homework.”

“Fuck off, Lucas.”

“*Language!*”

“Sorry, Mr. Wheeler.”

“—and Will’s got this awesome new idea for a comic book—”

“—Mike got me a waffle iron for Christmas—”

“—I thought I was going to be in such deep shit—”

“*Language*, Dustin!”

“Sorry, Mr. Wheeler!”

The dinner conversation comes to a grinding halt when Mrs. Wheeler bites her lip and fixes Billy with a look like she wants to eat him alive.

“So, Billy, how’s life over in California? From what Mike tells me, it sounds like you and Steve are having a blast. Have you found yourself a nice girl yet?”

Dustin chokes on his water.

“Aw, *shit*” Mike mutters, much to the rest of the kids’ amusement. (Thankfully, Mr. Wheeler has already retired to the living room to fall asleep in front of the TV).

Billy smirks then, and it’s the first time Steve’s seen him really smile since Wednesday, and he’s torn between feeling ecstatic and irritated that *of course* this is what it takes to snap Billy Hargrove out of a slump.

“Oh no, Mrs. Wheeler. I don’t date nice girls.” And then he winks and Steve *groans* and Mrs. Wheeler blushes scarlet.

Steve decides it’s time for him and Billy to go home.

The sky is grey when Steve wakes up the next morning, laden with low, blustery clouds threatening rain.

Yeah. That seems about right.

Billy is still fast asleep, one arm slung across Steve’s chest. He looks so *tired* and Steve wishes more than anything that he didn’t have to wake him up today.

“I can feel you staring at me, Harrington.” Billy flutters his eyes open and immediately narrows them.

Steve runs his thumb across Billy’s cheekbone. “Sorry.” He doesn’t mean it.

Billy exhales heavily and then gets up and sits on the edge of the bed, staring at the sky and not moving.

“Billy—” Steve watches his back stiffen with an aching familiarity.

“I’m fine.”

The funeral is just as grim as Steve had anticipated. What he doesn’t anticipate, however, is the amount of people who show up, hugging Susan and giving Max sympathetic pats on the shoulder. He doesn’t miss the way Neil’s friends from work sneer at Billy behind his back,

and when one of Susan's friends says to Billy, "oh, goodness, I didn't know Neil had a son," he doesn't give a shit how well-meaning she is; he wants to sock her in the stomach for the hurt that flashes across Billy's face.

Steve realizes that everyone here thinks Neil Hargrove was an upstanding, hard-working man who just tried to be a good father to his no-good son. He can see it in the way their eyes linger on Billy's too-long hair, and his too-wrong earring, and their not-nearly-discreet-enough whispers about "skipping town" and "never even coming back to visit." It hits him like a punch to the gut when he sees Billy realize it too, sees him square his shoulders and clench his jaw so tightly Steve thinks it must physically hurt.

And blood is rushing in his ears and he's so fucking angry that all he can think is *Fuck you, Neil Hargrove, I'm glad you're dead*. Steve knows he's a good person, or at least he tries to be, but as he watches Neil's coffin get lowered into the ground and hears Susan crying somewhere to his left, he just can't bring himself to feel sorry. Not one bit.

Billy is silent on the drive to the Hargrove's for the reception, knuckles white on the steering wheel (he had insisted on driving). Steve wonders if he's thinking about the last time he saw his dad, the night before they left for California.

Steve is just about to get into bed after a painfully awkward farewell dinner with his parents. His mom cried and begged him to check in regularly and his dad gave him an uncomfortable hug and told him to call if he needed money.

Yeah, he's definitely ready to leave Hawkins.

He isn't all that surprised when he hears the pebble clatter against his window. Billy wasn't supposed to come over until the following morning but Steve had this feeling that Neil wouldn't react to Billy leaving in the way that he knew deep down Billy hoped for. In fact, he had this feeling that Neil wouldn't react at all.

He is surprised when he opens the door to find Billy without a scratch on him. Distantly, he thinks about how weird it is that this Billy without a

scratch on him looks more hurt than he has ever seen him. He isn't bleeding, isn't bruised, nothing is broken—and Steve checks twice—but his face is ugly with pain. Steve feels sick as he watches Billy fight to regain composure, reaching out to lay his hand against the curve of Billy's face. After a few shuddering breaths, Billy manages to twist his face into something resembling the empty grin Steve is used to on nights like these.

"Want to go for a drive?"

Steve always does.

Even four years later, Billy had never told him what happened that night.

Billy pulls in front of the house and gets out of the BMW, slamming the door behind him so hard the whole car shakes. Steve follows reluctantly, his mind screaming at him to grab Billy and shove him back in the car and drive him far away from here, drive until they're back in California, drive until they're back *home* instead of walking into the one goddamn place Billy hates most.

Steve quickens his pace to catch up with Billy who is practically marching towards the house, Billy who has been all gritted teeth and clenched hands for days now, Billy who Steve knows is on the verge of cracking wide open. Steve does not want that Billy—*his* Billy—walking into that house alone.

Approximately two minutes after they enter the house, Steve knows he should have taken Billy and run when he had the chance. Billy's agitation is palpable. He keeps tugging at his collar, eyes darting wildly around the room like some kind of caged animal. People are making small talk at him and crowding him and whispering about him and touching him and Steve is again reminded that Billy is teetering dangerously close to the edge of something awful. Then Steve is pulled away and he feels like he's watching Billy get swarmed by a pack of wolves.

Steve is vaguely aware of Mrs. Stern attempting to engage him in conversation when he sees Billy's gaze flick over to the pictures on the mantle: Neil and Susan on vacation, Max's school photos, all three of them gathered around a Christmas tree. Steve thinks he and

Billy realize at the same time that there is not one single goddamn photo of Billy in this entire goddamn house.

Billy's tugging at his collar again and it's like watching him suffocate. Steve gives Mrs. Stern a hasty excuse and then makes a beeline for Billy. Before he can get to him, he sees one of Neil's friends curl his lip at Billy in disgust. "Nice of you to finally show up" he sneers.

And Steve stands there frozen as he watches Billy fall off the edge.

It takes one blow for the man to hit the floor and then Billy is on top of him, swinging wildly, and everyone is screaming and Steve is hauling Billy away and someone is yelling for Susan to call the police and Steve has no idea what the *fuck* to do so he does what he's wanted to do since the second they got there and *leaves*, dragging Billy behind him.

Billy lets himself be dragged along until they reach the car and then he springs back into action, shoving Steve against the car door.

"What the *fuck*, Harrington?" Billy's hands are fisted in Steve's jacket and he's glaring at him without really seeing him, glaring at him with pure loathing, and Steve wants to cry because it's like all Billy's worked on for the past four years has suddenly disappeared and they're back in high school again.

"Billy—baby, don't" he pleads, wrapping his fingers around Billy's wrist. "It's me. You're okay." He sees the fire in Billy's eyes flicker out and he lets go of Steve's jacket.

"No," Billy says slowly, his voice hollow. He looks down at his bloodied knuckles and then back up at the creases where he had been grasping at Steve's jacket.

Billy takes a step back and runs his tongue along his teeth.

"You want to know what my dad said to me the night I told him we were leaving for Cali?"

Steve's heart plummets.

"He said 'finally.' He said that maybe with me gone, he and Susan

could live a *normal* life, that he wouldn't have to deal with his fucked-up, piece-of-shit, *faggot* son." Billy laughs humorlessly and waves his bloodied hand at Steve. "Guess my old man was right after all."

"Billy—"

But it's too late, Billy spins on his heel and walks away.

Steve wonders how many more times he's going to have to call out Billy's name before he stops turning away from him. He presses the heels of his palms to his eyes, fighting the telltale burn of tears. By the time he removes them, Billy's gone.

Steve is sitting in the kitchen nursing a beer when he hears the doorbell ring and nearly knocks over a lamp in his rush to get it. The sun is starting to set and Billy still hasn't come back.

Steve fights the panic that claws up his throat when he wrenches open the door.

It's not Billy. It's Hopper.

"Hey, kid. Can I come in?"

Steve wordlessly turns and leads Hopper into the kitchen. Hopper takes his hat off and eases himself into the chair next to Steve's, fixing him with a serious look that Steve hasn't seen since the world was about to end four years ago.

"I was at the Hargrove's today. Ron Cavanaugh got his face beat in pretty badly." Steve opens his mouth to protest but Hopper raises a hand, silencing him. "He's not going to press charges. That's not why I came here."

Steve watches him open his mouth and then snap it shut, clearly searching for his next words.

"Look, my old man, he was a real mean drunk. And he was always drunk. I know men like Neil Hargrove, fought with men like him in

Nam. And I don't care what anyone in this town says, I know Neil was a mean old bastard too. My point is that shit leaves a mark. And it fucked me up for a long time and it will burn that kid alive if he lets it."

"He's getting better," Steve's voice is thick with emotion, tears blurring his vision, but he doesn't care. "He was doing so much better."

Hopper briefly places a reassuring hand on his shoulder and then stands up and drags a hand through his beard. "We got a call about a disturbance at the cemetery. Take your boy home, Harrington. Take him back to California and don't ever let him come here again."

Steve nods in gratitude and then takes off, tearing down the street in his BMW. He's not sure how he manages to get to the cemetery in one piece; all he can think about is *Billy*.

He hears Billy before he sees him, hears him screaming the second he gets out of the car.

"Fuck you, you fucking *bastard*, you fucking piece of shit!" Billy is cursing at the fresh mound of dirt at Neil Hargrove's grave. "You fucking *coward*, you don't get to just fucking die, you don't get a fucking out, you don't get to just *leave!* I should have killed you myself—I *wish* I'd killed you myself. Fuck you, dad, FUCK YOU!"

And then Billy is dropping to his knees and clawing at the dirt and sobbing and Steve can't bear it. He rushes over to Billy and kneels next to him and gathers him to his chest and feels him stiffen just for a moment and then he's wrapping his arms around Steve and clinging to him as he cracks wide open.

They stay kneeling together in the dirt long after it gets dark.

Finally, Billy pulls away and swipes wearily at his eyes. He looks drained and doesn't object when Steve tugs him to his feet and drapes his arm around him, letting Billy lean into his side.

"C'mon. Let's go."

Billy nods and the two of them walk towards the car, leaving the

mound of dirt behind them. Billy doesn't look back.

Billy doesn't speak for the rest of the night. When they get to Steve's bedroom, he lets Steve undress him, lets him lead him to bed, lets him pull him into his chest. Steve doesn't close his eyes until he hears Billy's breath even out and knows he's asleep—knows he's okay, at least for now.

Steve wakes with a start when he rolls over to find the bed empty. Launching himself out of bed, he stumbles down the hallway, opening his mouth to shout for Billy when he notices the bathroom light is on.

When he tentatively pushes the door open, he can't help the gasp that escapes his mouth.

Billy is perched on the edge of the bathtub, grabbing fistfuls of his hair and sawing at it with a pair of dull scissors. He doesn't look up when he hears Steve come in, just lifts up the strands of hair hanging by his face and snips. A thin stream of blood is trickling down his temple from where he'd nicked himself earlier.

"Oh god, Billy, oh god."

He still doesn't look up.

Steve grabs his hand before he can cut another clump, crouching down in front of him.

"Billy, what are you doing to yourself? Why are you doing this to yourself?"

Billy looks dazed and Steve is on the verge of calling Hopper or Joyce Byers or literally fucking *anyone* because he has no idea what to do when Billy's eyes refocus and he wrenches his hand out of Steve's grip.

"I don't need it anymore, okay? I just want it gone, okay? Okay?" A sob tears out of Billy's mouth and Steve nods.

“Okay, Billy.”

Billy’s hands are shaking violently as he lifts them back up to his head and Steve stops him, holds out his hand.

“Let me do it.”

Steve has never cut hair in his life, but he does his best, standing in the tub behind Billy, blonde hair and something so much bigger than blonde hair falling around his feet.

After it’s cut, Billy finally breaks the silence.

“I never want to come back here, Stevie.”

Steve puts the scissors down and gets out of the tub, kneeling between Billy’s legs and cupping his face firmly.

“You never have to, Billy. Never again.”

Billy and Steve fly home the next day.

They have breakfast with the kids before they say goodbye, and the understanding that Steve and Billy won’t be coming back to Hawkins hangs in the air like a storm cloud.

Billy doesn’t say much, but hugs Max tightly before they leave. Surprise flashes across her face and then she’s wrapping her arms around Billy fiercely and crying into his jacket.

“Promise you’ll call—”

Billy nods. “I promise.”

Steve’s goodbye to Dustin goes similarly.

As they drive out of Hawkins, Steve rests his head against the window and scans the streets he used to call home. He thinks about Dustin and the kids, thinks about Nancy, thinks about demodogs and Tommy and Carol and his parents’ too-big, too-empty house on

Sycamore Drive.

Steve thinks about the life he thought he'd live in Hawkins one day and the life he lives in California now. He watches Hawkins fall behind them in the rearview mirror, watches it grow smaller and smaller until it's out of sight.

It's 6 by the time they get home, and Billy still hasn't really said anything all day.

As soon as the front door closes behind them, he turns to Steve.

"Want to go for a drive?"

Steve always does.

They drive down the Pacific Coast Highway, the sun setting over the ocean and coloring the air pink.

Billy's left hand hangs out the window, scooping up the wind, and a cigarette dangles from the corner of his mouth.

He has an expression on his face that Steve doesn't recognize.

It looks a lot like peace.

Author's Note:

inkyreveries.tumblr.com for all your questions and concerns